

Economic group touts Lake County as leader in non-traditional commuters



Lake County commuters head to local businesses using public transportation rather than cars on Feb. 24, at the Braeside Metra Station in Highland Park. (Mark Kodiak Ukena / Lake County News-Sun)

By **Erin Gallagher**
News-Sun

FEBRUARY 24, 2017, 3:55 PM

When it comes to ride sharing in Lake County, Maggie Daly Skogsbakken knows what it's all about. Not only is she the spokesman for [Pace Suburban Bus](#), she was also drove a Pace vanpool for seven years.

Lake County's high number of non-traditional commuters — including those using these Pace programs, as well residents working from or closer to home — is one factor in what Lake County Partners describes as a higher quality of life in the county.

The nonprofit economic development organization recently released results of two independent studies showing that Lake County residents both live nearer to work and have a higher number of non-traditional commuters than other collar counties, according to Kevin Considine, managing director of the organization.

"The number of people both living and working in Lake County is a testament to the region, its thriving economy and quality of life," Considine said in a statement.

Elaborating on information sent out this week in the statement, Considine said people have shorter commutes due to the number of businesses in the county, which he said promotes a healthier life/work balance and higher quality of life.

"We have a lot of businesses here and a breadth of businesses here," he said. "Lake County is one of the largest manufacturing counties in the country."

There are 11 Fortune 500 companies in the county, including Abbott Laboratories, Baxter International, Discover Financial Services and Walgreens, he said.

The study Considine cited, Travel Trends 2016, was conducted by the [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\)](#). It showed that more than 69 percent of Lake County residents also work in the county, which has a higher live-and-work rate than any other suburban region.

Separately, American Community Survey estimates from 2011 to 2015 showed that nearly a quarter of Lake County residents were non-traditional commuters who either worked from home or carpooled to work.

"With more Lake County commuters opting for alternative transportation modes and a unique number of in-county commuters, we must continue to improve and enhance our local transportation infrastructure," Suzanne Zupec, president of the Lake County Transportation Alliance, said in a statement. "Development of new roads and investment in mass-transit options are essential to ease local traffic congestion and sustain Lake County's high quality of life."

For people like Daly Skogsbakken, ride sharing makes sense. In general, a group of people who live near each other who travel to work at the same company, same city or commute to the same train station can share a van, which Pace provides.

Pace buys the gas and pays for maintenance and car washes. The driver will arrange for all the maintenance and be responsible for picking everyone up in the van in exchange for free use of the van, as well as 300 miles a month for personal use, she said.

"It was a great cost-saving device," she said.

Daly Skogsbakken she now has a 10-year-old car with only 60,000 miles on it, most of which were gained after she stopped driving the van, she said. For others who drive vans, some are able to reduce the number of family cars, saving thousands on insurance, gas, and car payments, she said.

People who ride in the van pay about \$120 a month, can sometimes get picked up at their door, and have a guaranteed ride home, she said. No matter what happens to the van or the driver, the rider will always be able to get home, which is written into the program, Daly Skogsbakken said.

Pace also has shuttles from train stations to work places, and provide assistance in getting people matched for carpooling. Websites such as <http://www.PaceVanpool.com>, <http://www.PaceRideShare.com>, and <http://www.PaceBus.com> are all designed to be secure sites where commuters can answer questions at their convenience in order to find alternative rides, she said.

Pace can offer extensive assistance in organizing a group, such as working with an employer or a driver to find people living in the same areas, she said. Also, Pace representatives can provide individual assistance in helping people adjust their accounts in order to find transportation matches, such as suggesting an expansion of the pick-up time to include a window of time, she said.

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